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SOUTH AFRICAN CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE SERVICES: CHANGING TIMES OR BUSINESS AS USUAL?

Marianne Strydom, Gary Spolander, Lambert Engelbrecht, Linda Martin

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[mstrydom@sun.ac.za](mailto:mstrydom@sun.ac.za)

## **SOUTH AFRICAN CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE SERVICES: CHANGING TIMES OR BUSINESS AS USUAL?**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

South African welfare policies, like those of many other countries in the world, are influenced by global economic trends directing neoliberal policy implementation. The adoption of neoliberalism in South African government policies has elicited criticism (Holscher & Sewpaul, 2006; Mindry, 2008). Although the literature (Abramovitz, 2012; Spolander, 2014; Stark, 2008) has explored the changes and the challenges brought about by neoliberalism in social work, less detailed attention has been paid to its specific impact on child and family welfare services. The influence of neoliberal policies on child and family welfare organisations and their social workers in South Africa has also received scant attention. The purpose of this article is therefore to explore and promote debate in the profession and in civil society on the possible influence of neoliberalism in the management of child and welfare organisations, on service delivery as well as on social workers. This paper will discuss indicators of neoliberalism before exploring the implications for child and family welfare services in post-apartheid South Africa in relation to three key themes: the financing of welfare; structures and organisations; and the managing of clients. This discussion we believe is crucial toward developing an understanding of how these themes are linked, and to facilitate the critical debate necessary in civil society on child and family welfare in South Africa.

### **NEOLIBERALISM UNCOVERED**

The term “neoliberalism” used in popular discourse has come to mean different things to different people, its use transcending ideology, language, political discipline and economics (Harrison, 2010). However for the purposes of this paper neoliberalism has been treated as a class project, but one which is clothed in the rhetoric of individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility, free markets and privatisation, with the enormous centralisation of wealth and power in many countries testifying to the success of its implementation (Harvey, 2010). The neoliberal economic model has largely provided the impetus to facilitate competitive globalisation, by actively promoting market competition, free trade, labour flexibility and individualism (Peck & Tickell, 2002), alongside a strong rejection of Keynesian and collectivist strategies. Supporters of neoliberalism believe that greater reliance on the private sector will ultimately improve a country’s wealth and also its welfare services (Aguirre, Eick & Reese, 2006). Neoliberalism as an ideology is not above reproach and contains a number of suspect practices, including resource accumulation through dispossession and subsequent reallocation to the “rich”, increased “insecurity and precariousness” mostly through certain labour practices and financial insecurity, as well as the belief in incarceration and a “new punitiveness”, all being a contradiction between the theory and practice of implementation (Garrett, 2013:81).

Neoliberalism broadly seeks to reduce the size and influence of government, is in favour of deregulation and private enterprise, with the belief that as the state has less responsibility its financial requirements would diminish, resulting in lower taxation, which is considered good for economic growth (Harvey, 2010). As a result economic benefits would “trickle down” to all, including the poor. The paradox is that rather than a weak state, this ideology needs a strong state primarily to impose, maintain and manage the market within society (Spolander, Engelbrecht & Pullen-Sansfacon, 2015). However, in terms of the welfare of its citizens, the role of the neoliberal state is not to support the vulnerable, but to place the responsibility for wellbeing on the individual rather than the collective (Knox Haly, 2010).

Neoliberalism in practice has largely failed to produce the promised economic growth, with relatively consistent intensification in inequality, along with the biggest economic gains being made by the highest earners (Harvey, 2005). Indeed, US median incomes have fallen, despite corporate profits hitting all-time highs (Koechlin, 2012). The “economic shock therapy” which was applied to the former Eastern Europe and Russia resulted in economic deterioration (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism has also promoted a form of subjectivity, where dependence and vulnerability of the populace are experienced as shameful, with governments failing to provide sufficient trust, security and safety for their citizens (Layton, 2009).

In the South African environment social work has been forced to function in a neoliberal context (Holscher & Sewpaul, 2006) with neoliberal and managerialist agendas (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015). However, critics elsewhere have questioned whether social work, rather than being a victim of neoliberalism, has at times been a willing participant and uncritical of the role it has played in the conscious or unconscious promotion of neoliberal ideals (Lorenz, 2005; Spolander *et al.*, 2015).

## **CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE SERVICES AND POLICY**

Following the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, various policy changes were made. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) provided the overarching framework for a socio-economic platform from which to address the legacy of apartheid and mitigate the structural causes of poverty, which were seen as rooted in long-term discriminatory policies (<http://www.anc.org.za.pho?id=234>).

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) sought to advocate policy change in social work service delivery. The policy identified the purpose of child and family welfare services as ensuring the preservation of families so that a suitable environment can be provided for the physical, social and emotional development of all the members of the family. The Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) directs that service delivery to children and families must entail prevention services on the first tier, then early intervention services on the second tier, with the third tier focused on statutory services, requiring the removal of children from their parents. The final or fourth tier comprises reconstructive and after-care services (Department of Social Development, 2006, 2005). The Children’s Act (Republic of South Africa, Act 38 of 2005) provides for the protection of children through the

delivery of child and family welfare services at the above-mentioned levels, strongly emphasising the preservation and strengthening of families.

A strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention to avoid statutory services through the adoption of a developmental approach towards welfare was advocated. The social developmental approach to welfare of citizens embraces services was intended to be supportive, empowering families to use community services towards meeting their socio-economic needs. Child and family welfare organisations should deliver social work services with a predominantly preventative focus, aimed at the family, based in the community and were to be integrated with other services (Department of Social Development, 2006, 2004). However it is debateable whether services delivered on the different tiers have made a significant change to the macro or structural causes of inequality, service deficits and social injustice.

### **SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES MEET MACRO-ECONOMIC POLICY**

Social welfare service delivery is dependent on and influenced by macro-economic policy. Whilst “the contribution of social work to society” has been greater than that of any of the other caring professions, it “has always been contested”; social work and the delivery of welfare services have always been subject to political shifts, with more recently the implementation of a neoliberal ideology causing social workers to be “susceptible to public devaluing of the services they provide” (Lymbery, 2001:369). This arises, for example, from three key neoliberal practices (Harris, 2014): marketisation, through the introduction of markets; consumerisation, when individuals are held responsible for themselves and their lives (often adopted in social work practice through principles such as “client self-determination” and “individualism”) (Ferguson, 2008); and managerialism, with services in the public or voluntary sectors increasingly being modelled on management knowledge and techniques drawn from the private business sector to the exclusion of other factors. The difficulty with this latter practice is that it often promotes values different from those of the social work profession.

Neoliberal ideology proposes that the state diminish its role and that the contribution to and financing of welfare services be reduced, as the state views itself as a monitor rather than an implementer of services (Mindry, 2008; Pratt, 2006; Stark, 2008). The state is also forced to implement policies that seem to favour capital accumulation strategies (Sewpaul & Holscher, 2004; Stark, 2008). The promotion of neoliberalism in welfare service delivery in South Africa has been established with the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR), which in 1996 replaced the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010; Holscher & Sewpaul, 2006; Mindry, 2008; Patel, 2011).

The state’s GEAR programme purported to promote macro-economic stability and marked a moving away from the static service-orientated model towards a marketised service delivery model that supported the privatisation of services. In seeming contradiction to neoliberal ideology, the role of the state has thus changed from being the guarantor of services to the provider of services. However, this shift has meant, for example, that municipal services are managed as a business with the focus on financial

cost recovery and not on the rendering of affordable services to all members of society (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010; Mindry, 2008). Increased tariffs for water, sanitation, electricity and other municipal services constituted one result of this implementation, which also gave rise to various protest actions expressing dissatisfaction with such services and rates (Bond, 2014). Thus market principles were introduced into public service provision.

With regard to welfare service delivery in South Africa, the impact of neoliberalism became more apparent during the implementation of the RDP when non-governmental organisations (NGOs) became partners of the state in the planning and development of services, as well as being dependent on and directed by state funding. This marked a deviation from the apartheid era status quo when some NGOs acted as a critical voice and opposed the policies of the government (where appropriate) and delivered services with funds donated by other countries. These NGOs therefore did not consider themselves partners of the apartheid government (Mindry, 2008). The new partnership after 1994 meant that organisations became strongly aligned with the state as a result of being drawn into commissioning and contracting arrangements for state funding. This could have resulted in critical voices being increasingly muted, as NGOs become complicit partners of the state in the implementation of policy and especially neoliberal policy (Mindry, 2008).

Although NGOs may not necessarily be in agreement with the state policy, their financially dependent status as a result of the partnership could make it difficult for them to object to government policy. Sewpaul and Holscher (2006:174) postulate, however, that “examples of purposeful acts of resistance by social workers in post-apartheid South Africa have been rare” and that they would rather submit to passive resistance. Nevertheless, as a result, the use of contracting mechanisms holds consequences for bureaucracy, fixed contract deliverables, and creates insecurity because of the dependence on short-term financing (Carson & Kerr, 2010). In countries like the United Kingdom the promotion of this alternative method of welfare provision has made it easier for the state to force service redesign (Taylor, 2012).

## **SOCIAL WORK STRUCTURE MATTERS: THE FINANCING OF WELFARE**

In relation to the financing of social work services in South Africa, the Financial Awards Policy had a strong neoliberal orientation from the beginning, particularly as its focus was on the purchasing of services (Sewpaul & Holscher, 2004). The current Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers (Department of Social Development, 2015) retains a strong focus on outcomes, achieving targets and the monitoring of services. It has, for example, again indicated that NGOs that are financed will have to deliver specific programmes in accordance with predetermined priorities and norms and standards of the Department (Department of Social Development, 2015). Within this context child and family welfare service funding is no longer grants-based, but requires offering service plans to the state to receive funds (Schmid, 2010). These service plans are then performance-managed by the state, resulting in NGOs needing to comply with

the requirements of the state (Holsher & Sewpaul, 2006). Social workers must also comply with the rules of their employing organisation as well as the commissioners of their services, which could result in professional responsibilities being conflicted between the wellbeing of the client or family, and honouring their obligations towards their organisations (Holscher & Sewpaul, 2006).

Despite the shift to welfare services being funded through service plans, additional pressure derives from the expectation that child and family welfare social workers will focus more strongly on preventative and supportive services, in line with the national social developmental welfare policy (Children's Act, 2005; Department of Social Development, 2006). In 2006 writers had already noted that the intended increase of prevention services as required by the developmental welfare policy did not appear to include increased funding for the extension of service responsibility (Holscher & Sewpaul, 2006).

Despite research results repeatedly demonstrating that child and family welfare organisations do not have sufficient funds to provide comprehensive preventative services, no serious attempt has been made to adapt the current welfare funding model (Streak & Poggenpoel, 2005; Strydom, 2010). Social welfare organisations are therefore expected to meet increased demand from within their existing budgets. Pressure ensues with welfare organisations being expected to provide more services from a largely static funding basis. Organisations therefore continue to struggle particularly, as Schmid (2010) concludes, now that more functions are delegated to NGOs than they have the capacity and resources to manage.

The extension of services without increased funding has had devastating effects on the quality of services (Holscher & Sewpaul, 2006). The unsurprising consequence has been that service delivery, in child and family welfare services, remains statutory in nature (Ndonga, 2015; Strydom, 2010; Van Huysteen & Strydom, 2015) with developmental and preventative programmes being dependent on the time remaining after the provision of statutory services. The inadequate funding of services delivered by NGOs was raised in all provinces during the review process of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997). Issues were related to insufficient funding for preventative and early intervention services, as well as the fact that funding was reduced in some provinces, which led to cutbacks in certain services (Department of Social Development, 2016). In consequence financial limitations as a result of neoliberalism continue to have a detrimental impact on service delivery (Knox Haly, 2010) and, sadly, the intended shift to preventative services has not taken place effectively (Ndonga, 2015; Strydom, 2010).

In addition to changes to the financing mechanisms of social welfare organisations, as highlighted earlier, the use of a contracting culture, marketisation and private sector management techniques has resulted in a range of intended as well as unintended changes in the structure and management of welfare organisations. One aspect of neoliberalism has been the introduction of explicit standards and performance measures, with an emphasis on outputs rather than processes (Parada, Todd, Barnoff, Moffatt, Panitch, Mucina & Pyne, 2012; Stark, 2008). As a consequence problems can be

reformulated to fit an economic point of view so that the solution of these problems is sought in an increase in the productive outputs of the organisation (Pollitt, cited in Sewpaul & Holscher, 2004). Consequently, welfare services are managed as a business, with an emphasis on effectiveness, efficiency and robust performance management and the assumption that active management drives performance improvement (Harris & Lauerdale, 2012; Parada *et al.*, 2012; Spolander, 2014), as well as better outcomes for service recipients.

Performance improvement and effectiveness could indicate a strong focus on measurable outcomes or making targets. Indeed, outcomes in child and family welfare organisations in South Africa are often measured mainly in terms of how many people are reached or involved in a specific programme, thus a strong focus on computable results. The focus of management is strongly aligned with measurement, as the financing of the welfare organisations by the state depends entirely on the efficient execution of these commissioned and contractually binding service-level agreements (SLA) or transfer payment agreements (TPA). To comply with the demands of management, funding models and contractual obligations, there must out of sheer necessity also be a shift in the greater use of performance measures, which might also realign the focus of service delivery, or the forced redesigning of services.

The extent of this requirement was highlighted in a more recent investigation by Schmid (2013), where child and family welfare organisations indicated that “accountability demands from the State were unreasonable and detracted from the commitments to the task for which the funding was intended” (Schmid, 2013:23). In the review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) concerns were raised about the SLA signed between the Department of Social Development (DSD) and NGOs. Some concerns were that the inflexible nature of the SLA or TPA made it difficult to respond to the needs of the community. Another concern was the lack of time to review the agreement, as it was expected of the NGO to sign immediately without questions being attended to (Department of Social Development, 2016). Another recent South African study found that social workers were hounded about targets that needed to be met, despite a lack of resources (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015). Thus accountability to the DSD could be driving service delivery and not necessarily the needs of families and children living in communities characterised by huge structural inequalities.

Whilst the authors do not reject the need for appropriate and effective use of resources and benefits that management can contribute, this should be considered critically and meaningfully in the context of service needs. A strong emphasis on outcomes alone has been questioned in England as to whether they are compatible with the values of social work; as Rogowski (2012:929) observes, the shift to “managerial social work is anathema to the values of social work and the commitment to social justice and social change”. Social workers are often so preoccupied in doing the work that they may be in danger of losing sight of the uniqueness of social work interventions or the importance of relationships, especially as the focus has shifted to achieving performance targets and indicators (Rogowski, 2012). In South Africa research found that social workers felt oppressed by management, that they were forbidden to be critical of injustices in the

DSD offices, and that the quality of services were marked by new managerial practices. They felt that there was a misfit between the work that they were doing and what their professional mandate was (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015).

A selective focus on the achievement of targets could also have implications for the implementation of the development approach in South Africa. In particular, the challenges of community and human development arose because of their expensive, time-consuming and relationship-dependent requirements, alongside the notorious difficulties in quantifying the precise level of resources required for success. It is important that social work consider its position in history, how it shapes current debate, its resilience and attempts to achieve social justice. Whilst questions of professional accountability and resource management are important areas of policy debate, the promotion of highly rational forms of management based only on economic efficiency and without any consideration or understanding of meaning and values has the potential to destroy social relationships, values and principles as well as social responsibility.

## **CREATING AND MANAGING USERS OF SERVICES**

The reliance on neoliberal economic policy is increasingly creating social divisions, with a widening gap between the rich and the poor (Dominelli, 2002; Harvey, 2010). The belief in marketisation is resulting in a discourse that suggests that welfare states create unhealthy dependency and users of services, with the poor being cast as either “customers or scroungers” (Grover & Piggott, 2005). The recent crisis and subsequent financial support, along with stringent conditions, in southern European states, i.e. Greece and Portugal, have been compared to the structural adjustment programmes attached to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank development programmes in the global south during the 1980s and 1990s (Ottersen *et al.*, 2014). The effects of these “adjustments” were mostly negative (Breman & Shelton, 2007) with adverse impacts on health services and the social determinants of health (Pfeiffer & Chapman, 2010). In a South African context, with its lower levels of support, concern has been raised about the creation of a dependency culture (Surender, Noble & Ntshongwana, 2010).

The neoliberal focus of the South African government has led to widening inequality and high rates of unemployment, resulting in the expansion of the social grant system in an attempt to stave off a possibly explosive situation (Ferguson, 2009). Harris and Lauerdale (2012:427) cite Ishmael Lesufi (2002:295, 296), who remarked that the government’s neoliberal policy “has been nothing short of disastrous”, since “not only does the strategy fail to eradicate poverty,” but it also actually “creates poverty” and redistributes “wealth from the poor to the rich”, and that instead of “wealth trickling down to the poor” as promised by the neoliberal advocates of globalisation, “millions of people trickle down into poverty”.

As we consider poverty and social inequality, we need to consider the role of precarity as a result of these macro-structural changes. In the USA precarity has resulted from global price competition, capital owners’ short-term interest, reduced state intervention in the labour market and the decline of unions. The experience of global forces for high-



income industrial countries differs from that of other less industrial economies in part because of their “inclusive” national industrial relations and “culture” of collectivism (Kalleberg, 2011:183).

Despite election promises of jobs by the African National Congress (Barcgiesi, 2011) to reduce racial and class inequality, the majority of jobs created from 1995-2003 were in the informal economy and therefore precarious. In 2005 writers concluded that the labour market has become increasingly polarised and structured into three distorted zones (Von Holdt & Webster, 2005): (i) formal employment with security of employment (with echoes of the racial division of labour and hierarchical power); (ii) a substantial core of negligibly protected or represented, subcontracted, untrained, part-time and domestic employees (with marginal or little security of employment); and (iii) the periphery of unemployed and informal subsistence activities or non-paid labour. The core zone comprises around a third of the working population.

The unemployment rate is still high and was 26.6%, in the first quarter of 2016 with an average unemployment rate between 2000 and 2016 of 25.31%. This rate refers to the number of people actively looking for a job, but if the definition of unemployment is enlarged to include people who have stopped looking for a job, the number goes up to 36.4% in the second quarter of 2016 (Trading Economics, n.d.). In this context the boundaries between formal and informal employment, work and subsistence become increasingly blurred (Lee & Kofman, 2012). As a result, a substantial proportion of the population relies on a variety of strategies to ensure a livelihood through unpaid domestic work, government grants and assets such as livestock or land (Scully, 2012). This situation results in workforce vulnerability, working-class insecurity and a discourse of antipathy against foreigners or undocumented workers, unemployed youths, and the subordination of women (Barchiesi, 2011:232). This reality, together with historical underinvestment in health and social welfare has resulted in neoliberal practices having even greater harmful consequences for South Africa (Holscher & Sewpaul, 2006). These harmful effects include work-related stress and negative impacts on the wellbeing of workers, users of services and communities (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010:100).

## **CONSEQUENCES OF NEOLIBERALISM IN CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE SERVICES**

If Lesufi's (2002) view is accepted that millions of people have trickled down into poverty in South Africa, this naturally suggests that the caseloads of social workers, especially at child and family welfare organisations, would have increased following the greater demand for services. The literature indicates a strong correlation between poverty, unemployment and child neglect (Connell, Bergeron, Katz, Saunders & Tebes, 2007; Frederick & Goddard, 2007). Social workers in the Western Cape Metropolitan area and surroundings in South Africa also indicated poverty to be one of the most important risk factors for child abuse and neglect and the consequent statutory interventions (Strydom, 2010). In a more recent study in another part of the country social workers mentioned that workloads were high and that they were unable to manage

it (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015), a fact that was also recognised in the review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) (Department of Social Development, 2016). Child and family welfare organisations also indicated that “child poverty is a major issue” in service delivery (Schmid, 2013:12).

The fact that the social security system or grants system has been expanded and is widely seen as a poverty-alleviation measure has further implications for child and family welfare organisations, since an important risk factor for child abuse and neglect arises when a family member in a household is the recipient of social security (Chaffin, Bonner & Hill, 2001; Connell *et al.*, 2007) and in South Africa a grant often has to cover the expenses of the whole family. Thus, whenever large numbers of citizens receive social grants, the risk of child abuse and neglect increases.

Furthermore the needs of families, according to child and family welfare social workers in South Africa, seem to resort at the macro level of society, in terms of employment, job opportunities for unskilled workers, housing, poverty alleviation and available resources (Strydom, 2008). Poverty, unemployment and the incidence of substance abuse increase the caseloads of child and family welfare organisations as the rise of these macro-level needs is associated with child neglect and abuse in families (Frederick & Goddard, 2007). Child abuse and especially child neglect correlate strongly with the occurrence of the abovementioned structural obstacles in communities (poverty, unemployment, low educational levels) and in society, which are not caused by individuals themselves. From a neoliberal perspective, however, poverty is often viewed as a situation for which the individual himself is responsible (Stark, 2008), for instance, through insufficient investment in social capital. It is not often concluded to be the result of structural problems in society such as the lack of job opportunities for unskilled workers.

In the South African context of high caseloads in child welfare, the primary emphasis will often be on child protection, with insufficient time allocated for preventative or community work services (Strydom, 2010). Neoliberal ideas have reinforced the strong emphasis on child protection services in child and family welfare practice in South Africa (Schmid, 2010) and as a result of the structural challenges, discussed earlier, research (Streak & Poggenpoel 2005; Strydom, 2010) indicates the overwhelming emphasis placed on statutory services, as well as statutory service models (Ndonga, 2016; Patel, Hochfeld, Graham & Selipsky, 2008; Strydom, 2010). As a result the paradigm shift to preventative service delivery remains an aspiration, but is also deeply embedded in the need for greater macro-related social work intervention and critical leadership and management.

Whilst designated child and family welfare organisations are delivering statutory services, the funding model has not been adapted and these services are not completely funded by the state. Thus, organisations are expected to implement the principles of the Department of Social Development, but do not receive the appropriate financial support, with developmental social work interventions bearing the brunt (Schmid, 2013). Even with the implementation of the Children’s Act (2005) there has been no commitment by

the state to fully fund the statutory services provided by NGOs (Schmid, 2007). This lack of funding maintains a crisis approach and at the same time a residual approach (Schmid, 2013).

The impact of neoliberalism on the delivery of child and family welfare services in South Africa reflects similar experiences in northern hemisphere countries, including traditional welfare states. For instance, lower public expenditure in Finland has led to an increase in child poverty, as well as to increased family poverty in the lower socio-economic groups. The demand for child and family welfare services has increased, as have calls for a stronger focus on child protection (Satka, Harrikari, Hoikkala & Pekkarinen, 2007).

In England the strong focus on evidence-based practice has resulted in child and family welfare social workers doing evidence-based interventions, but where there were no concerns about child protection, little assistance was offered to clients. Interventions that were done were usually prescriptive and authoritarian in nature, with clients being told what changes they should make in their behaviour and lifestyles, or suffer the consequences, including the possibility of having their children removed (Rogowski, 2012). A neoliberal approach thus meant that where resources were limited, the only aim was to determine which families could not protect their children against abuse and neglect and only then to remove the children. Families where the children were not considered to be in danger, were left alone (Parton, 2009).

The outcome of neoliberalism in England has therefore resulted in a preoccupation with security and prevention, with the responsibility for both being placed on the individual (Garrett, 2008). This focus affects the nature of the services offered. In terms of neoliberal policy the role of social workers in service delivery comprises questioning, the gathering of information and the inspection of families' homes and lifestyles. In many cases these activities do not purport to render assistance or to determine what support the family may need, but rather to defend the reputation of the organisation in case things go wrong (Rogowski, 2012). The central focus of social workers is not to fulfil the needs of children, but to assess the existing risks and then to manage them (Parton, 1998). Child and family welfare services are thus aimed squarely at the management of risk. In South Africa high caseloads and lack of resources, as a result of structural inequalities, could likewise force social workers to focus on risk management and monitoring families rather than on delivering services that support and empower families. The redesigning of services could thus have been undertaken without the active involvement of social workers in the design.

The combination of insufficient funding, lack of people power and the strong emphasis by the state on evidence-based practice or the meeting of targets must have had a deteriorating effect on the initiation and maintaining of community-based preventative programmes and resources in accordance with the developmental paradigm in South Africa. Adequate financial resources are a crucial aspect of the development of a successful community-based resource. Increasingly international funding is actually channelled through the state instead of NGOs in contrast to circumstances before 1994

and critics argue that government often delivers too slowly to communities (Schmid & Patel, 2014).

The implementation of developmental welfare programmes in child and family welfare services may thus have deteriorated to a planning approach in community work, with the focus on once-off projects and not on projects where community resources are harnessed to offer continual support to children and families, thus reducing the need for statutory services and enhancing the preservation of families. For example, research has found that parent guidance or education groups are at most offered only once or twice a year at child and family welfare organisations and that there is a total lack of community-based family support programmes (Strydom, 2013). Consistency in service delivery is further undermined by a lack of support services where parents can regularly receive support in their roles as parents and at the same time break through the social isolation that is a distinctive characteristic of child abuse and neglect. If sufficient support systems are lacking in communities, along with mechanisms to address precarity, the possibility of statutory services coming into play is increased. Alongside the inability to meet the demand for services (Schmid, 2007), social workers are under pressure from managers to reach service plan targets (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015). The temptation is therefore for services to be shaped by the focus of contractual services to demand targets delivery and secure future funding rather than what might be in the best interest of the child or the family.

## **POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS**

A neoliberal approach to the management and delivery of child and family welfare services will inevitably also have an impact on the social workers who render services in this environment. Research into the impact of neoliberalism on social workers and care workers indicated significantly higher levels of stress and more cases of burn-out among these workers (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010).

A neoliberal approach deprived social workers of the assurance that they could exercise control in their work situation, such as having enough time to think and plan, adequate resources and professional autonomy (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). This loss of autonomy or control in the work environment is anecdotally also expressed by child and family welfare social workers in South Africa. Short-term services, especially crisis intervention services, seem to be those which, in the opinion of the social workers, are prioritised. As a result, crisis intervention, when done on a regular basis, could make workers feel that they cannot control their work load, because of insufficient time for planning, thereby encouraging a crisis-orientated approach (Strydom, 2012). Social workers interviewed for the review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) stated that they experienced “feelings of despair and hopelessness about the impact of their work in a situation where they were involved in ongoing crisis management” and “an inability to focus on work specified in their job descriptions” (Department of Social Development, 2016). Some of these feelings were confirmed in another study where social workers felt that there was a misfit between the work that they were doing and what their professional mandate was (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015).

Furthermore, the autonomy of social workers could be severely limited by the strong control and monitoring of services by the state in accordance with the Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers (2015), as well as the pressure from supervisors to meet targets. Child and family welfare social workers complained about the control that management had over all aspects of their practice, that there was a lack of understanding and that they were expected to compromise. For example, permission had to be obtained from various key staff members (who are not qualified social workers) to do an emergency home visit (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015) and they were bogged down with completing report forms on a daily basis, reducing the time to do real social work (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015; Pretorius, 2017).

The above situation correspond with Ferguson's (2004) observation that within neoliberalism a managerial approach is required to restrict costs, where the activities of the social workers would demand ever greater control, as well as having to employ unqualified staff to do the work previously undertaken by professionals. Knox-Haly (2010) states that the outcome of neoliberalism is that cost constraints would be implemented to the detriment of service delivery.

It was also argued that neoliberalism has created ethical issues for social workers and health workers, for example, having to choose between complying with the rules of the government and honouring professional commitments, as well as managing the shortfall in the availability of resources (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). The lack of resources in child and family welfare in South Africa is felt on two fronts: within the organisation and within the community. In the organisation social workers can often not fulfil their duties when, for example, no vehicles are available for social workers to do home visits (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015; Ndonga, 2016; Strydom, 2010). Other research results concluded that offices were in a disgraceful condition, resulting in social workers drawing attention to the lack of hope that these conditions would instil in their client systems. Despite offices not being in a good condition and the lack of office equipment such as computers causing delays, there was still a lot of pressure to reach targets (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015). Funds are also not sufficient to initiate programmes and to sustain them (Streak & Poggenpoel, 2005; Strydom, 2010).

In addition, social workers maintain that resources in the community are limited and often not affordable for families (Strydom, 2010). Workloads are also too heavy to deliver specialised services like marital counselling, which means that families cannot get access to this service (Strydom, 2012). This lack of resources created an unacceptable atmosphere, tension and conflict, and social workers found it difficult to respond to emergency situations. Some indicated that they would "steal" another social worker's car to meet targets because of pressure from management (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015).

Policy documents moreover conclude that child and family welfare services should be geared towards preventative services by, for example, enabling families to make use of resources in the community (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997; Department of Social Development, 2006). A neoliberal perspective emerges where it is

assumed that there are sufficient assets in communities (Schmid, 2007) to address the needs of client systems. The creation of resources is also not regarded as the responsibility of the government, but rather as the responsibility of the NGO that renders services in a specific area. Stark (2008) indicated in this regard that neoliberal policies increased the tasks of social workers, but expected them to deliver more with less.

Social workers were subject to burn-out and stress when they felt less able to help their clients and where staff shortages led to increased pressure, exacerbating already poor working conditions. The combination of high caseloads, the perception of having less control over workloads, and ineffectiveness can lead to stress (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). A major contributing factor to burn-out in child protection social workers is the unmanageability of the work load, resulting in resignations (McFadden, Campbell and Taylor, 2014). Responses of social workers, according to the study by Dlamini and Sewpaul (2015), were the experience of a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness, and the majority of them were seeking other employment.

The purpose of a caring service is to help people improve their lives, to support the poor and to contribute to positive social change. If these goals cannot be met, the result is a type of stress unique to health and service delivery workers (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). The caring and supportive nature of social work does not fit with neoliberal ideology, which emphasises that people must take responsibility for their own lives, supported by their families and friends, as well as local organisations and volunteer agencies (Rogowski, 2012).

## **CONSEQUENCES FOR CLIENTS**

It seems that neoliberalism and its management also have implications for the way in which clients are viewed by social workers (Cowden & Singh, 2007; Stark, 2008). Within the scope of neoliberal policy the clients of social workers have changed into customers (Stark, 2008) or consumers (Cowden & Singh, 2007), and as customers they are not only responsible themselves for the stressors they experience, but also for the solutions to these problems as well as for their successes or failures (Stark, 2008). This obviously determines the nature of the services rendered.

Stark (2008) concludes that the focus in service delivery has shifted from building a relationship with a client to what is the best way of managing a case, with the result that the client is neglected. More emphasis is placed on the assumption of “victim blaming” (Abramovitz, 2012; Spolander, 2014), which means that there is something wrong with the clients rather than that something which they could not have foreseen or averted has happened to them (Abramovitz, 2012). Consequently the focus is on the risks that arise and the associated responsibilities of the client. The influence of the environment and the availability of resources are considered less important (Liebenberg, Unger & Ikeda, 2013).

## **CONCLUSION**

The strong focus of neoliberalism in South Africa has, as in most other countries, specific implications for social work. It is probably one of the more important reasons

why the paradigm shift from statutory services towards a developmental paradigm with the focus on prevention has not yet taken place. In addition, theory would suggest that the individuals must also accept responsibility for their failure to invest in their social capital. The lack of sufficient funding for NGOs is an important contributing factor, but so is the fact that the caseloads of social workers were increased as a result of the neoliberal approach.

There are other structural factors in communities that increase the incidence of child abuse and neglect, such as poverty, unemployment and low income. Although these structural factors have always been present in South Africa, the greater prevalence of these aspects as a result of neoliberal policies could have increased the case loads of social workers even more. Inadequate funding has resulted in the emphasis of child and family welfare services shifting towards child protection, including a possibly strong focus on risk management, in other words to determine which families are at the highest risk of child abuse and neglect, and to render services to these families only, while services to other families are limited or non-existent.

However, another aspect that needs to be considered relates to the content and nature of these child protection services, as well as to the types of child protection services that are supposed to be rendered in accordance with the Children's Act. The possibility exists that child and family welfare social workers follow an authoritarian approach, as a result of the high caseloads, where clients and families are, in accordance with neoliberal policy, considered to be the cause of their own problems and are informed of changes that they must make to their lifestyles in order to avoid having their children removed.

Neoliberalism in South Africa could thus also have changed the way in which families who are experiencing problems in caring for their children are approached, in light of the fact that the focus of service delivery is on the reaching of targets and not necessarily on what is in the best interests of the client or family. Service plans in accordance with the policy of the government and the targets that should be reached could thus be the starting point for intervention.

In practice, this situation has specific implications for especially the training of student social workers at universities as well as for in-service training at welfare organisations. There will have to be a stronger focus, in the training of child and family welfare workers, on the effects of neoliberalism and the management of its consequences in service delivery, especially with regard to the possible discrepancy between what is expected in terms of reaching targets and ticking boxes, and the needs of client systems and communities. A social work force which cannot take a stand against social policy that does not primarily allow for the uniqueness of human beings in their environment and their unique stressors will not remain true to the values of the social work profession.

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*Dr Marianne Strydom, Department of Social Work, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa; Mr Gary Spolander, School for Psychological, Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coventry University, Coventry, England; Prof Lambert Engelbrecht, Department of Social Work, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa; Ms Linda Martin, School for Psychological, Social and Behavioural Sciences Coventry University, Coventry, England.*